1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
EZ6 Malta EZ6

178 99 tion can read, travel and make contact directly and vicariously with the world outside. Emigration too has tested the strength of the Faith. In consequence, we can now find in Malta a historical cross-section represented in spatial distribution. At one extreme one can meet in Sliema agnostic Maltese who never go near a church; at the other, in rural Gozo, one can find general obedience to the Bishop's instructions. All societies are heterogeneous in this respect but in Malta the strain of division within society is particularly great because of the existence of so many other cleavages. The reaction of the Church to this new situation has been dual in character. In the first place the Church itself has taken official action. Reform and correction, the imposition of rigorous film and book censorship, the series of edicts on dress and on behaviour have accompanied research, such as that of Abbé Houtart (22), into the needs of the people. Secondly, there have appeared the lay organisations with the avowed intent of redressing the balance. M.U.S.E.U.M. and Catholic Action before World War II, Cana, Legion of Mary, Social Action, the Holy Name Society and many others of foreign and indigenous origin since 1945 have developed in the conurbation where the challenge to the Church was strongest (23).

Financially the Church is still strong, owning as it does some 19 per cent. of the agricultural land of the Islands and an unverifiable total of urban property (24). Politically, the strength of the Church rests on its hold over the minds and hearts of the people. It is not necessary for the Church to take much overt action to demonstrate its power.

178 256 655 722 As a last vignette of the changing Maltese socio-economic complex we may consider some aspects of recent research on a useful indicator of social change, the bread baking industry (25).

The purchasing, distribution and processing of wheat and wheat flour, remains as it has been for centuries, Government controlled. When the Knights established their capital at Valletta and when the suburb-outwork of Floriana was built, great stone-chamber granaries were hewn out of the solid rock, developed versions of the much older 'bell-pits'. These underground granaries were stocked by the official organisation, the *Università*, and the grain periodically distributed at controlled prices. This siege-system, necessitated by dependence on imports, was abolished in the early nineteenth century, and the newly established Board of Trade contented itself with licensing importations. As a measure of agricultural protection and for the raising of revenue, duties were levied on these shipments. During the twentieth century, and culminating in the emergency measures of the beleaguered Islands during World War II, controls became tighter and grain prices heavily subsidised.

178 256 During the period of urbanisation and more especially during the last siege the general practice of home baking rapidly declined in Malta, although in Gozo it still persists. In the latter island there was in 1957 only one full-time and one part-time commercial bakery, while in Malta there were 201. All food grains produced for sale in the Island should legally be sent to licensed flour mills for blending. Imports, almost entirely of hard Canadian grain, are made by the Department of Trade and by the Victualling Yard in H.M. Dockyard. Ninety-seven per cent. of all flour issued for ration-bread making is subsidised, but local estimates suggest that up to 50 per cent. is used for making other products, this illegally used flour being sold at a discount.

178 256 Fig. 67 shows the distribution of bakeries in Malta, their importance and the main distribution areas as they existed in 1957. Only two villages in 1950 and one in 1957 - Safi - did not possess their own bakeries. This however is not indicative of closed fields of distribution but only of the multiplicity and the small-scale of the enterprises. Of the 35 districts, 32 imported bread from and 17 exported bread to other areas. Over half the 15,000 bags of subsidised flour issued in 1950 eventually found their way as bread outside the receiving districts. Of this inter-regional trade, Qormi supplied almost 80 per cent. Very briefly the points of interest are as follows. Qormi, which in 1957 had 48 bakeries, has always been the traditional baking centre, partly because of its central situation, but mainly as noted in Chapter VIII because of its situation in

[See p. 198 -- Analyst]

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

[p. 55]

CHAPTER V

The Church and Village Politics

Most Maltese regulate their lives by the daily and monthly cycle of religious activities. The major divisions of the day are rung from the bells of the village church. They first ring the Paternoster half an hour before the first Mass. Then the Angelus bell rings a call to prayer at eight in the morning, at noon and at sunset. The final bell of the day is rung two or three hours after sunset, and is a brief request for the living to remember the dead in their prayers. The call of the Angelus is observed by many. When it is rung, work and conversation stop whether in a government office or a village café, men remove their hats, and someone among them leads them in a short prayer. In Gozo I have seen a busy square become suddenly silent and many people kneel in the street as the Ave Maria was rung at sunset. People also often kneel in the streets when the bells announce the elevation of the Host during a sung Mass, and during Benediction in the evening. And finally, late in the evening, clusters of relatives and neighbours can be seen sitting in their open doorways reciting the Rosary together before they go to bed.

Most girls and women and many boys and men attend one of the three or four daily Masses which are offered in all parish churches between four and seven in the morning. Virtually every one in the village attends one of the five or six Masses offered on Sundays. The few who do not attend are known to the village, and are the subject of gossip and other social pressure. Since the recent dispute between the MLP and the Church, however, their numbers are increasing.

As the church bells mark the important hours of the day, so the principal divisions of the year are set out by the annual national and parochial religious feasts and processions. Besides being major religious occasions, they are eagerly looked forward to as recreational events. Though secular spectacles, such as political rallies, the government-run Carnival procession and, above all, the

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

cinema, are becoming increasingly important, the principal amusements of the Maltese still generally have some connection with their religious ceremonies. The French Consul in Malta at the beginning of the last century described this enjoyment of religion with great eloquence:

> Le Maltais a de la religion au fond de l'âme; cette religion, dont il remplit les devoirs sans ostentation, il l'aime autant plus qu'elle prend sa source, non seulement dans une foi sincère, mais encore dans cette habitude, contractée dès l'enfance, de chercher au sein des cérémonies religieuses un délassement, que les autres peuples trouvent dans les spectacles et les réjouissances publiques.[1]

People from all parishes come to take part in the diocesan celebrations of St. Joseph the Worker, Corpus Christi and Christ the King. These rallies and processions are usually held in Valletta and Floriana. The national festival of St. Paul's Shipwreck in February, which is also the titular feast of a Valletta parish, draws many people into the city. Another national feast commemorates the lifting of the great Turkish siege in 1565. This feast coincides with that of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary on September 8, and is celebrated with boat races and other aquatic competitions in the Grand Harbour. But the traditional national festivals for the country people are the feasts of St. Gregory in April and SS. Peter and Paul (*L-Imnarja*) in June. Though most of the pageantry of the former has been abolished, the custom of going for a picnic to Marsaxlokk, the little village just beyond the terminal point of the procession in Żejtun, lingers on. On the occasion of the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, thousands proceed to the Buskett, Malta's only wood, where they spend most of the night before the feast eating, drinking and singing. On the feast day they throng to see the agricultural show in the Buskett, the religious procession in Mdina and the bareback horse races that take place just outside Rabat. While these two feasts are the occasions for special outings for the villagers, they are generally looked upon as very low affairs by many from the professional and middle classes.

The principal religious spectacles, however, are those which are organized at the village level. During the course of a year in Kortin, for example, there are fourteen major celebrations and

[1] M. Miège, *Histoire de Malte* (3 vols., Paris, Paulin, 1840), III, 168.

9: Luke G-5 (ca. 1920-ca. 1960) 1960
EZ6 Malta EZ6

CHAPTER XVIII

Old Survivals in Modern Malta

MALTA OCCUPIES A PLACE OF ITS OWN IN THE OLD WORLD not only by reason of the length and unusual character of its annals, not only by reason of the tremendous range of its architectural monuments. It does so because it combines with these features the circumstance that it is the home of a separate race, the smallest of European peoples.

There are, it is true, four independent states in Europe of lesser size than Malta, but the inhabitants of these states do not form distinct racial stocks, nor have they their own languages. The Maltese are the smallest nation with the longest history, and their islands are a microcosm, self-contained. Not only has Malta its own tongue. It has its own University—the oldest in the British Commonwealth Overseas and granted the Royal patronage and the prefix "Royal" by King George VI in his coronation year—with seven faculties: Theology, Laws, Medicine and Surgery, Dental Surgery, Engineering and Architecture, Arts, Science. It has, as we have seen, its own Nobility with their Committee of Privileges. It is an ecclesiastical Province whose Archbishop exercises jurisdiction since 1944 over the bishopric of Gozo, previously immediately subject to the Holy See since its formation in 1864. And in the history of this microcosm has been mirrored the life of the great world around it.

Viewed as a part of the British Commonwealth, Malta is unique in two particulars. It is the only British possession whose Government owns an Opera House and in normal times maintains an annual opera season and conducts the pawnbroking of the nation in the manner of certain Continental states.

9: Luke G-5 (ca. 1920-ca. 1960) 1960
EZ6 Malta EZ6

states. Alone with Gibraltar it runs a Lotto (with weekly drawings) as a Government Department. Until 1866 Malta's Opera House was the Manoel Theatre, a little gem of a playhouse built as the Court Theatre by Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena in 1731 and believed to be the oldest theatre in Europe. It is easy enough to appreciate how daintily graceful it must have looked when the audience, arrayed in the brocades and perukes of the eighteenth century, was assembled to witness some comedy of Molière or Goldoni. Later used as a cinema, it is now being scientifically restored to its original form and purpose.

In 1866 the new Opera House, officially called the Theatre Royal, was completed at a cost of £60,000 just within Kingsgate, partly on the site of a dilapidated old bakery which has been identified with the house of the Turcopilier, title of the Pillar or Head of the Langue of England. In 1873 this building, which was designed by Barry, the architect of the Covent Garden Theatre, in a style which while dignified was entirely out of harmony with Valetta's prevailing architectural character, was seriously damaged by fire and was reconstructed at a farther cost of £20,000. Before its destruction in the Second World War it was the only theatre known to the writer where it was the rule for male members of the audience to attend the evening performances either in mess dress or in evening dress with decorations.

The Monte di Pietà, the Government pawnbroking Department, was established at the end of the sixteenth century and was housed in its present handsome office in Merchants' Street by Ximenes, the last but two of Malta's Grand Masters. Connected with the Monte di Pietà is an institution known as the Monte di Redenzione. In wandering about the island the visitor will occasionally encounter a building of the seventeenth or eighteenth century adorned with a shield representing three cones surmounted by the letter "R". These buildings constitute the property, now administered by the Government of Malta under a trust, of

9: Luke G-5 (ca. 1920-ca. 1960) 1960
EZ6 Malta EZ6

the Monte di Redenzione, a foundation established more than three hundred years ago by one Father Rafael, a Maltese Capuchin.

Preaching one day in the year 1607 in S. John's Conventual Church, this good friar called upon his hearers to inaugurate a fund for the redemption of the Christian captives of the Barbary States, whose sufferings he depicted in terms of such realism that the Grand Master, Alof de Wignacourt, was able to set up the Monte di Redenzione with the offerings of the congregation and of members of the Order. Later, other charitable persons added or made bequests to the fund, which at first paid a ransom of 70 scudi for each Maltese slave and 150 scudi for a Knight of the Order. Subsequently these rates were raised to 200 and 500 scudi respectively; but, as the wars between the Order and the Barbary States ceased and the latter discontinued their raids on the island, the original object of the trust came to be fulfilled. So its properties were combined with those of the Monte di Pietà and administered by the Order, and thus continue to be administered to the present day by the Malta Government.

The most important property of the Monte di Redenzione is Selmun Castle, which stands on a high eminence overlooking S. Paul's Island and S. Paul's Bay. It is a clumsy replica of Verdala but is none the less impressive with its four towers and general air of a mediæval fortified stronghold. A balcony that completely encircles the castle, towers and all, is a pleasing feature of a building which might otherwise seem heavy and lacking in the gracefulness which Verdala, vast as it is, possesses in so marked a degree. Another attractive little property of the Redenzione is a handsome armorial ornamented gateway of the reign of Grand Master Pinto, standing below Selmun near the junction of the main road between S. Paul's Bay and Mellieha and the track to Kalamistra.

In his wanderings, especially in the country districts, the

9: Luke G-5 (ca. 1920-ca. 1960) 1960
EZ6 Malta EZ6
Gozo

may also be combined with a tricky piece of rock-climbing—how tricky the writer can testify from personal experience—by anyone prepared to scale the precipitous islet known as the Fungus Rock, which closes the entrance to the lagoon of Qala Dwejra.

This impressive and now almost inaccessible rock takes its name from the strange and repellent-looking black plant (*Fucus coccineus melitensis*) which grows on its summit and in the days of the Order was regarded as a sovereign remedy against hæmorrhage and dysentery. The plant was a perquisite of the Grand Masters, and a guard was provided in a tower on the mainland to keep away trespassers. Those who came legitimately to take the fungus landed by means of a basket suspended on ropes stretched between the rock and the nearest point on the mainland; an old water-colour in the Malta Museum depicts this means of transit, which has long since disappeared. It was evidently of a somewhat precarious nature, at all events to judge from the account of a gentleman who effected the passage in 1815:[1]

> One object of curiosity on the south side of the island [*sc.* Gozo] is a rock, on which grows a kind of fungus, which is used as a styptic. The passage to this rock is rather curious, if not dangerous; two ropes are made fast on each shore, on which a box with grooves on its edges passes over. A Maltese first works his way across, then the person desirous to go over draws the box back and seats himself in it, when he is hauled over by the guide; in this manner as many as please can go, one at a time.
>
> It is not a very pleasant sensation to be suspended some hundred feet above the water, and if there is any wind, the movement of the box is anything but agreeable, and all that can be obtained are a few pieces of fungus. I was well pleased to be back again, and made a determination never to risk my precious carcase in that conveyance again. It seems very strange to be swinging up in the air between two rocks, with sea-gulls and other aquatics flying about below you.

[1] From *Malta Sixty Years Ago*, by Claudius Shaw (London, 1875).